

Library

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

JOHN McROBERTS

R
977.32
M248o

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

R
977.32
M2480

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

This manuscript numbering ³² pages is a transcript of one or more tape-recorded interviews with me. Any reader should bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of my spoken rather than my written word.

It is understood that the Joliet Junior College Learning Resource Center will allow others to read and utilize this manuscript and/or the tapes from time to time in connection with the educational purposes of the College and in accordance with the usual standards of the Learning Resource Center.

I hereby give and grant to Joliet Junior College as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the College shall determine the full use of this information.

Understood and agreed to

Interviewers

Robert E. Sterling
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

3/13/74
(date)

Interviewee

John W. Roberts
(signature)

422 Gardner
(address)

Joliet Ill.
(city & state)

3-13-74
(date)

This manuscript is hereby made available for research in accordance with the conditions set forth in the Interviewee Agreement. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publications, are reserved to Joliet Junior College. Persons wishing to quote any part of this manuscript must obtain written permission from the Director of the College Learning Resource Center.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Joliet Junior College Library

<https://archive.org/details/mcrobertsjohn00joli>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Birthplace and Background-----	5
Working As a Youth At Dellwood Park-----	6
Identifying Pictures, Pictures, Pictures-----	9
And The Band Played On (At Dellwood)-----	11
Electric Railroad -----	13
More Pictures -----	14
Rock Run Park and The Canal -----	17
Elevating the Tracks -----	19
Steel Works Club -----	21
Employment With "The 'J'" -----	23
Floating Through The Manhole -----	24
Family's First Car -----	26
Local Amusement -----	27
Neighbors -----	29
The Modern Conveniences -----	30

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Jack McRoberts

INTERVIEWER: Robert E. Sterling

STERLING: This is an interview with Mr. Jack McRoberts at his home at 422 Gardner Street, Joliet, Illinois, on March 13, 1974. Maybe we could start by your telling me when and where you were born.

McROBERTS: I was born right here in the barn you see in the back end of the lot right here now. My mother and father built that before they built the house, and that was where I was born.

STERLING: In the barn?

McROBERTS: In what is the barn now. Yes, that was on December 9, 1892.

STERLING: Were your parents life-long residents of Joliet?

McROBERTS: My mother was. She was born here, but my father was born in Chicago. He came out here when he was a small boy; and they settled in Troy in a log cabin out there, I guess, as far as I know. Then they moved to Joliet. His father was a veterinarian and a blacksmith.

STERLING: What did your father do for a living?

McROBERTS: My father was a yardmaster for the E J & E.

STERLING: You then grew up right here on this corner?

McROBERTS: That's right.

STERLING: And you lived here all your life?

McROBERTS: That's right. I've lived here all my life until...I'm being

run out. /Laughter/ So, in the next month I'll be out of here, I hope, or close to it.

STERLING: You're selling now?

McROBERTS: Oh, yes. Well, I'm going to. I haven't signed yet because I haven't been able to get the things that are necessary. They are in the lock box downtown, and I just came home from the hospital yesterday so I'll have to just wait a little while.

STERLING: As a young man you worked at Dellwood as a ticket taker, is that right?

McROBERTS: I worked up there, I think, every job but two. One was taking tickets on the scenic railway, and the other one was setting the brakes at the bottom of the scenic railway when the ride was over. There were two fellows from Lockport that had that job. Most of the time I think I worked them all with the exception of that and as a motion-picture operator. I have never learned that. They promised to teach that to me, and I went up there a couple of days; but I was an outdoor fellow, and I couldn't see that at all.

STERLING: When was it that you worked there?

McROBERTS: Well, let's see. I worked 1910, 1909, 1908. It's three years during vacation.

STERLING: During the summers?

McROBERTS: That's right.

STERLING: Describe some of the jobs that you did.

McROBERTS: That I did do?

STERLING: Yes.

McROBERTS: First job that I had was running the baby rack. That's where they knock the babies down. You've seen that, haven't you?

STERLING: Throwing balls at the dolls?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: How much did it cost?

McROBERTS: How much did it cost then? You got three balls for maybe it was a nickel, I don't know. I can't remember. It's a small sum now. Right next to that I ran a shooting gallery one year. I took tickets at the theater one year. I took tickets on the dance floor for maybe a couple of years. I worked at the boathouse one summer...part of one summer.

STERLING: What did that job involve?

McROBERTS: Renting out boats.

STERLING: Renting boats?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: Do you recall what they rented for?

McROBERTS: No.

STERLING: Did they have people there that would actually do the rowing, or did people have to row their own?

McROBERTS: Oh, no, you rented it and rowed yourself. It was a beautiful

park at that time, a beautiful park. I was a messenger boy for J. R. Blackwell; he was superintendent of the streetcar lines. He owned the park. I worked there one summer for him before I worked at Dellwood Park. That consisted mostly of carrying messages between Joliet and Dellwood Park. I used to deliver orders to the different cement people and the sand and the gravel and plumbing and all that kind of stuff.

STERLING: What was your favorite job that you did?

McROBERTS: I don't know as I ever had any. I never formed much of an opinion.

STERLING: Were any of them harder than the others?

McROBERTS: No, there was nothing, no labor with them at all. Although I was taking tickets at the motion picture theater; and, of course, it was ballyhoo in those days. I had a talking machine. All it was for was to make noise. He owned one record, and it was a laughing record. That nearly drove me nuts! /Laughter/

STERLING: Maybe we could look at some of these pictures and you can describe them.

McROBERTS: That's the grandstand, if you want to call it that, the baseball stand where they sat to watch baseball. Joliet Standard played up there. In this one he's loading gasoline in his airplane out of a five-gallon can. Those were real small airplanes. I imagine you could lift them up.

STERLING: Were you there when they flew these?

McROBERTS: I took all these pictures.

STERLING: Oh, you took these pictures!

McROBERTS: Oh, sure! Sure, I took all these pictures. I see there's quite a bunch of them here.

STERLING: Now, who flew the plane? Who owned it?

McROBERTS: That I couldn't tell you. That was the first plane that ever landed in Joliet. That's in 1912; it might have been the same year.

STERLING: It looks like they had quite a crowd turn out for it.

McROBERTS: I don't remember it being advertised or anything...These pictures are at Dellwood Park.

STERLING: What about this picture?

McROBERTS: That's done away with now; they just tore it down in the last six months...There is a vacant lot on the corner of Washington and Joliet. Right next to the vacant lot was this building. My grandfather put it up. This is my grandmother. He told her she could either have a home or visit the Centennial, so she took the home; this is the home. They rented this out, and there was a five-room apartment on top.

STERLING: Was he the proprietor of the small store there?

McROBERTS: No, this was after he was dead. They say they rented it out. I never remembered this; this was before my time. An uncle of mine ran a cigar factory in part of it. There were some lunch rooms; I never remember them. It must have been small because this ran back the length of the building.

STERLING: They owned the whole building, and your uncle ran this tobacco

shop in one part of it.

McROBERTS: That's right.

STERLING: Now this is a picture of the boat house.

McROBERTS: That's the boat house, and that's the boats that used to be there. This is the crew that I worked with. These are the two twins that I told you I worked with. I think they were Swedish, from Lockport. You couldn't tell the difference. I would get on one of these cars and hand one of them a ticket when I was a kid. And after you get your ride, you come around to the bottom and the other one would pull the brakes. I always wondered how the devil that boy got down there so quick. You couldn't tell them apart; they were twins. /Laughter/

STERLING: How did that scenic railroad work? How was it powered?

McROBERTS: By electricity, as far as I know now. It would take you up, and that was the end of it. Then it went from there all the way around and back down. It was powered going up. I think it worked by electricity.

STERLING: I notice in this second boat over here there are a couple of black fellows. Did blacks go to Dellwood often?

McROBERTS: No, I don't know how they were there. You wouldn't see them. The only ones I remember, one time they had a dance. No, there was no niggers in there, not a one. No...there's one over there in that second boat. I never noticed that. It looks like one anyhow.

STERLING: Here is another picture of the crew.

McROBERTS: That's the same ones. I forgot this fellow was around. He had

a hamburger stand up there..This was a nice sort of a young man; I can't remember what he did...This is me...This fellow ran a bakery across from a calendar factory in the later years...Here is these two twins right here. ...This is an old carnival man; I learned an awful lot about carnivals from him...This fellow's name was Jordan; he was the son of the manager. ...This was Tom someone. Have you ever heard about Tommy Bartlett around here? There was a family of Bartletts up on North Eastern Avenue, and he was one of them.

STERLING: He's the third guy in the second row there with his arms folded.

McROBERTS: Yes. This fellow's name is Bentley..Jordan is this man's name. These...I can't remember their names.

STERLING: Bentley is next to Bartlett, and George is next to him...I never was at Dellwood; I don't have any idea what it was like. You say there was a dance floor? Did they attract many big bands?

McROBERTS: No, it was a Joliet band. It played night after night. There was no big bands as I remember it then. That was what we might call the midway. That was up on top and only lasted about three years before it burned down. How, I don't know. They moved it and they had a great big building they called the Chataqua Building. They divided that and made a dance hall out of it. And later as it became more prosperous and successful, they made the whole thing into a dance floor. It was a nice dance floor. A lot of people went up there.

STERLING: Where did they draw most of their people from, Lockport or Joliet?

McROBERTS: Mostly from Joliet. Of course, they had big picnics out of Chicago before this Jordan came there. He ruined the park, because he was a religious fellow and used to go to Chicago and try to pick up church picnics and stuff like that. Prior to that they used to solicit the picnics in stores. Marshall Field's would have a day; Carson Pirie would have a day; there probably was about five big days. I mean big days. They would come down by the trainloads. The tracks were right there alongside of the road. They came down around the road there and walked up the hill. That was the days before automobiles were what you call perfected as they are today.

STERLING: Who was Jordan? When did he come along? How does he fit into the picture?

McROBERTS: It was a big electric outfit, a streetcar outfit; and their home base was in Philadelphia.

STERLING: They actually built the park?

McROBERTS: They actually built the park.

STERLING: Why did they build it?

McROBERTS: To attract business out of Chicago; there was an electric line from there into Chicago. They built it to attract the visitors out of Chicago, and, of course, business out of Joliet. On big days it was like bumper-to-bumper streetcars. They would go up the hill almost to where the dance hall was and make a little circle. They made a little circle up there and picked up after they had unloaded, and then they were on their way back to Joliet. On big days like Labor Day or the Fourth of July, stuff like that, it was continuous. There was a lot of business down there.

STERLING: And then when the electric railroad went out of business they sold the park?

McROBERTS: No.

STERLING: Now, getting back to Jordan...how does he...

McROBERTS: Jordan was hired out of Philadelphia someplace.

STERLING: To manage the park?

McROBERTS: To manage the park, yes. He didn't last too very long because you can't run an amusement park with Sunday School picnics. You can't do it.

STERLING: Did they serve beer and liquor at the park?

McROBERTS: No, there was never any liquor or beer sold there.

STERLING: What were the biggest attractions? Why would people come...to picnic or because of the amusements and the rides and boating?

McROBERTS: Some of them would come year after year out of Chicago on account of the beauty of the park. If you have never been up there, go up and take a look; it's worth seeing. Practically everything is there yet. But it was on the one street. You can see where it was. The buildings are gone. I don't remember if the tower is there yet or not.....There's your boat house at night.

STERLING: Is that what it actually looked like?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: It had all those lights on it?

McROBERTS: I took that.

STERLING: You took the picture?

McROBERTS: I took all of these pictures...Here is another picture.

STERLING: What was in the tower?

McROBERTS: Down at the bottom of it they sold pop and stuff like that, popcorn, Cracker Jack. There was nothing inside. They just built it as an attraction. You could see it all over when it was lit up.

STERLING: Could people go up there and view the area?

McROBERTS: No. There is the stand where they went to watch baseball games. That is how close this thing was to the baseball park.

STERLING: What baseball team played there?

McROBERTS: The Joliet Standards.

STERLING: Were they a professional team?

McROBERTS: Semi-professional.

STERLING: Who did they play against?

McROBERTS: They played against the Sox one time.

STERLING: Is that right? Out there?

McROBERTS: ...Here's the town over there at night.

STERLING: It's quite impressive.

McROBERTS: Here's in 1914...That is still here...This center is still

there unless they have torn it down since I've been up there...This had one of those concave mirror houses that made you look funny...and also a photograph shop...Over on this side is a theater...Down here is what they used to call the concession booth...It had little golden balls and all that kind of stuff...This is a bridge up there. That is still there as far as I know. Just as I say, it has been several years since I've been through it now.

STERLING: That was a footbridge? The train didn't go across there?

McROBERTS: Yes, a footbridge...See, it was just a footbridge. No return on your money now. And that was a tremendous amount of money that they put into that park.

STERLING: But, then they got their money off of the amusements.

McROBERTS: Yes...Now here is your scenic railway. This is where you turn up in here...this come down, like this...I think this must have been the second shoot. Then they went around this little lake, and crossed over in here someplace and back up again.

STERLING: Did they call that Lake Chautauqua?

McROBERTS: I don't think it ever had a name...That's the old blast furnaces at the mill...Here they are again.

STERLING: When people got off the train or the electric train, do they walk under a tunnel?

McROBERTS: There was a tunnel, yes. If you got off in front of the park, on the Lockport cars or something like that (not only Dellwood), you would get off there and walk down. And there was a tunnel underneath, and you

would walk up again. The dam that held the water back, that backed up from the creek; and the water held that up. It had a tunnel underneath it. The first couple of years it was beautifully lighted and everything; then it was vandalized, and they give up on that.

STERLING: Did any national politicians or any people of reputation go to Dellwood Park that you can remember?

McROBERTS: I guess there was a lot of them with bad reputations!

/Laughter/

STERLING: Any notorious people visit Dellwood while you were there?

McROBERTS: I don't know. I suppose there was. They had a regular band, a regular Dellwood band. They had a bandstand up there, and every so often they had a singer. They had one woman there one weekend, I believe; I think she must have been a high-priced singer, because she had a beautiful voice, beautiful voice. She sang mostly Irish songs, and she could really sing them. I don't know who she was or anything. You see, I was about seventeen years old the last year I worked there, so I wasn't thinking much about the big shots or anything else.

STERLING: Were there any serious accidents that you can remember?

McROBERTS: I think there was only one. I think there was one killed; it wasn't too dangerous. As I remember, it was a woman who must have stood up screaming, you know, like they get hysterical, stood up and went around a curve, and out she went. But that's all as far as I remember.

STERLING: Did Dellwood have much competition from Electric Park?

McROBERTS: No, there was nothing in Electric Park. That was a bunch of

cottages, summer cottages that fellows from here used to rent. They lived there during the summer and went back and forth on the Electric Railway there which was a different company. No, there was nothing in Electric Park outside of a...they built a dance hall in there later. At one time they did have a scenic railway, but it was so late that things were going out of date. Automobiles were coming in. No, there was nothing in Electric Park only these cottages.

STERLING: I got some other pictures with me. I want to see if you can identify a couple of them. Where were these shots? That wasn't in Dellwood, was it?

McROBERTS: No.

STERLING: Did they have a shoot-the-shoots like that around here?

McROBERTS: They might have. They had what they called Rock Run Park, but I never was in it.

STERLING: Where was that?

McROBERTS: It was down the canal; they used to go by canal boat. It was down about half way between here and Channahon. What did I say, Rock Run Park?

STERLING: Right.

McROBERTS: Maybe that's right. As you go between here and Channahon on Route 6, you cross a creek and that's...I don't remember what the name of the creek is...I can't remember, but it was on that order anyhow. Well, it was at the junction of the canal and this creek. They had a little amusement park in there; and I guess it was quite popular at some time,

but I never was in it. So I don't know. That would be the only place that it could be, because I would probably know any place else.

STERLING: In 1911 there was a big G.A.R. parade in Joliet. Do you remember that, the G.A.R. encampment?

McROBERTS: No, I don't remember. I can't recall it, but that's Vic's Motorcycle Shop...Right where it says "Bar" in there," Bar." It must have been one right next door...An alley ran through there...Right next door was McFadden's Livery Stable.

STERLING: ...Stillman's Corner?

McROBERTS: Yes...Fagan's Jewelry Store...He had a great big auction, and I guess he run it a month here. He sold out, and, I guess, went to California.

STERLING: He had an acution?

McROBERTS: Yes, a big auction. He sold everything.

STERLING: Is that right?

McROBERTS: Yes. I used to go down; oh, I suppose I was down there a half-a-dozen times. There's a few things here in the house that my father bought out of there...This is quite early; this must have been around 1908 or 1909 I would say. Yes....

STERLING:...Here's a picture of the Rock Island at street level.

McROBERTS: Yes, Rock Island at street level and it would have cut off part of the courthouse. You're quite right...Yes, that's a good picture for those days.

STERLING: Do you remember the fire department when it looked like this?

McROBERTS: No. /Laughter/ Oh, I remember the horses, but I never saw this picture before now...It looks as if it was on Scott Street, but I don't know.

STERLING: Yes, it does look like that.

McROBERTS: ... This ole guy was fire chief for many years. I forget his name now...Paige, I believe. Oh, I have seen them lots of times with horses. They were well-trained. The harnesses sat up and hung up above them. When that bell would ring, these horses would just go nuts trying to get out, you know. They'd drop the harnesses down and buckle their belts underneath them, open the door, and away they'd go.

STERLING: Is that right?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: Do you remember when they put the elevated in?

McROBERTS: Well, they put up the concrete walls first. Right over where the vacant lot is there between here and the railroad on the back end of that lot, that was all piled up with what we used to call logs. They were great big timbers about like that. They raised it, I think, gradually. They just carried it across until it was held up with gravel and concrete. They built the concrete walls, and they were well built, too, because they are still holding...This is 1912, I believe...You see this is looking north.

STERLING: Do you remember when they were just building the high school?

McROBERTS: Oh, sure. I got another picture of that. Oh, I don't know...

downstairs, or upstairs in the attic. The attic is full of junk, too. And yes, I used to drive my father to work; he was yard master at the mill. We used to go around here. I used to see it everyday, every afternoon and night. I was a small kid. I used to take him up, and then I'd drive back the buggy.

STERLING: You used to drive him off to work in the buggy?

McROBERTS: Oh, yes. I don't say there was no automobiles, but there weren't very many of them.

STERLING: ...Where would this picture have been taken?

McROBERTS: That's on the canal. Where, I don't know. Chances are that that's a boat from down at this Rock Run Park. I never saw it. I have been down the canal, but I never saw where the park was. It's down the canal.

STERLING: Can you remember when the canal was used?

McROBERTS: I have just a hazy recollection, just hazy. I can only remember one where they were towing the boat. Later these steam engines came in. Yes, just a hazy bit...There are boats here for rental, so this must have been Rock Run Park.

STERLING: ...What kinds of things did they sell here? What kind of a store was the Spot Cash?

McROBERTS: It was just a general store with groceries and meats. That's about all you could say for it. It was all right. It was a good store, I guess, as far as I ever remember.

STERLING: Where did your parents do most of their shopping?

McROBERTS: My folks? Well, my grandparents, they only lived a block and a half or two blocks away from, or kiddy-corner down the block; and they did their shopping there as far as I know. There was no supermarket, of course. There was a little store up here, a wooden building up here that was a grocery store and meat market until approximately fifty years ago.

STERLING: Were you ever in the Steel Works Club?

McROBERTS: I belonged to it.

STERLING: Did you really? What was it like?

McROBERTS: It was a real good club. It had everything in it. It had a handball court, a basketball court; it had a gymnasium with ladders and so on and so forth. It had a swimming pool, a beautiful swimming pool. It had a nice library and a pool hall in it.

STERLING: Did they have memberships, too?

McROBERTS: Not outside memberships. My father worked for the E J & E which is a subsidiary of the steel company, so he had to request a ticket for me. I don't remember if it cost anything.

STERLING: They had a swimming pool in there?

McROBERTS: Oh, a beautiful swimming pool.

STERLING: Handball?

McROBERTS: A handball court -- how about that!

STERLING: That's not still there, is it?

McROBERTS: No, that burned. It burned down; they sold it to...I don't know

what the name of the church is -- they were Hungarians, I think. Sometime during the...it seems to me it was a Christmas celebration, some of the decorations, maybe the Christmas tree or something that they had...it might have started that way -- I don't know -- but anyway, it burned. Then they tore it down.

STERLING: ...What about Central School?

McROBERTS: ...There was an old stone building there; it was the Joliet High School.

STERLING: Next to that?

McROBERTS: No...Right where this is...yes, this is the Central School downtown...This was built after...There was a stone building there...It was the Joliet High School.

STERLING: That stood in the same spot?

McROBERTS: ...Yes, the same spot where this is.

STERLING: ...Then they tore down the high school and built that?

McROBERTS: That's right.

STERLING: Were high school classes held at Central then?

McROBERTS: They had them afterwards. Where this school is, it turned into a manual arts center...Yes, this was built later, sure...There must be a picture around here someplace.

STERLING: Do you remember when they put in the sanitary canal?

McROBERTS: It's just hazy. It was a great thing to hire a surrey and go up and see that on a little picnic on a Sunday afternoon. No, I never saw it.

STERLING: ...Is that Barrett's building?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: Do you remember when that burned?

McROBERTS: Yes, I do. I was hunting down on Goose Lake at the time it burned. I didn't see it until a day or two after.

STERLING: It was one of the biggest fires Joliet had.

McROBERTS: I guess it was. Yes sir, I believe it was.

STERLING: Is there anything else that we should chat about?

McROBERTS: We could chat about anything. Sixty years ago, or better. What would you want to know?

STERLING: You worked at the "J" for awhile, too.

McROBERTS: Just a little while -- 51 years. /Laughter/

STERLING: /Laughter/ Just a little while! How did operations change there from the time you started until the time you ended?

McROBERTS: It was a railroad then. That was a railroad. I was saying the other day here that when I started to work nights at the mill, the engines had kerosene lamps for headlights with a reflector back of them and no electricity at all. The rest of it, until the diesels came in, was about the same. That is up there at the mill. Of course, at East Joliet yards that was quite different.

STERLING: You worked at the steel mill yard?

McROBERTS: I worked there when I first started. Then I went up to East Joliet, as we call it; and I wound up there.

STERLING: What did you do?

McROBERTS: I worked with the agent's office. I think we worked every kind of a job.

STERLING: Did you get to know any of the engineers? You probably knew them all.

McROBERTS: Most of them.

STERLING: Did you know Ed Parry? Or George Colgrove? They might have been after you.

McROBERTS: No. I have been out of there for twelve years.

STERLING: So it changed quite a bit?

McROBERTS: Oh, you bet. Yes, that railroad is run altogether different than it used to be.

STERLING: Do you remember the flood Joliet had?

McROBERTS: Yes, 1902. I went down a manhole.

STERLING: You what?

McROBERTS: I went down a manhole. That's the big steel covers--through a sewer. Yes, I did. That was on Washington Street. Someplace along in there. It's probably opposite where the Union Depot is now. Of course,

there was no elevation. When it was all flooded, my father and I walked down the tracks here...And we were going over to my grandparents, and he met somebody he knew and stopped to chew the rag. I kept on going. Evidently the force of the water earlier blew this manhole cover off. I went on down. As soon as I stepped into it, I went down. I knew enough from being in the water and swimming to immediately bring myself up--or I would have gone on down to the Mississippi. /Laughter/

STERLING: Did you go in over your head?

McROBERTS: Oh, yes. He turned around and missed me, and I popped up; and so he ran and pulled me out.

STERLING: That could have been dangerous.

McROBERTS: Yes, that was some flood. Yeah, there was a dandy. It came up to Sherman Street here, and come up to, well, I don't know where it went.. About 150 feet this side of I-80 is where it ended.

STERLING: Did you get any water in the house here?

McROBERTS: No. No. But this is on a little plateau, and it seems like everything goes away from it.

STERLING: Do you remember when the cars first came in?

McROBERTS: Streetcars?

STERLING: No, automobiles.

McROBERTS: Oh, yes, sure. The first one that I remember was down here about two or three blocks. And we was really small kids; and everytime we hear them come out with it, you know, we could hear it, and we'd chase them all

over to see -- watch -- them break down and fix it. /Laughter/ Oh, yes.

STERLING: When did you get your first car? When did your folks get their first car?

McROBERTS: In, I think it was 1912. It was a 1910 Ford. I was telling a story here the last few days -- I don't know what different people it was, but we bought it in Chicago. I went up there with dad. We bought it and arranged to have it brought down a day or two later, whatever it was. Of course, you didn't sign up for payments in them days; you had the cash. And when I went up, they would tell me about it. He says, "Well," he says, "it's in good shape." He says, "I'll send a man down with you to drive it till you get the hang of it." And, he says, "But there is one thing I wish you would do -- I wish you would buy an extra tire and two or three inner-tubes for a long trip like that from Chicago."

STERLING: How about that? You had problems with flats?

McROBERTS: With what?

STERLING: With flat tires.

McROBERTS: Oh, yes, a lot of trouble.

STERLING: Where did you buy gas when you first got it?

McROBERTS: At a grocery store, or sometimes out here at the Standard Oil Company. We'd go out there, and there was a platform, and you'd drive up, and you could fill it up out of a five-gallon can. As I said not long ago, I grew up with automobiles. Of course, out here in the barn after the house was built and we moved in here and I think at one time I had three

horses out here in the barn. Then I had a barnyard and put out on the sidewalk on Fifth Avenue a big black stall; and horses could run out, you know, and get an exercise.

STERLING: Where was the fairgrounds?

McROBERTS: Which?

STERLING: Will County Fairgrounds? I've seen a picture of that, and I was just wondering where it was.

McROBERTS: Out at what we called Ingalls Park. Go out Second Avenue in a streetcar, and then it would turn and hit Washington Street just before you cross the creek. Then we continued on up Washington Street by where the cemetery is now, and right just about where that school is there at Briggs Street. I think it would be just in that corner, on the southeast corner.

STERLING: That was the Will County Fairgrounds?

McROBERTS: That is the Will County Fairgrounds. That is the one that I knew. There is one out here in Brookman, you know, prior to that; but I never saw it. But that Will County Fairgrounds they always said was the finest track in the United States. Because when they built it, they built it with sod. But they cut it in strips about this big; and instead of laying the sod like you would a lawn, they would turn it up and lay it flat like that. It had that much bounce. They claim it was the finest racetrack in the United States. I don't know, but that is where the fairgrounds were at.

STERLING: What else did Jolietans do for amusement back then when you were a kid?

McROBERTS: About the only thing there was the Opera House. They used to have plays there; and well, of course, the motion pictures came out. I couldn't tell you when, but it was 1907, '08, '09, '10, along in there.

STERLING: When you began courting the women, where did you take them on dates?

McROBERTS: Well, if you had one and there was no place to go, you could go to the Orpheum and go up to the Princess. And they had a motion picture house on Cass Street about three or four doors east off of Chicago; and there was one there about where Goldblatt's was, called the Colonial, and one down on Jefferson Street near the river. And the seats were kitchen chairs tied together.

STERLING: Is that right? Did they have any favorite malt shops or ice cream places?

McROBERTS: Yes. Stillman's was the favorite ice cream stop. And there was Blacy's on the corner of Chicago and Jefferson. That was the most prominent corner of town. Then there was another Blacy's down on the corner of Cass and Chicago. And there was a big one, here built, and it would go out of business and another one would open up someplace else west of here. And, of course, as far as saloons is concerned, they are very common all over.

STERLING: ..Well, this area up here used to be what they call the "Silk Stocking" district?

McROBERTS: Similar -- the "Silk Stocking Seventh."

STERLING: Oh, the "Silk Stocking Seventh."

McROBERTS: That's right.

STERLING: Who were some of your prominent neighbors?

McROBERTS: Well, Kinsley's next door. Burgers -- you can see a picture of his tobacco shop on where the railroads cross at Jefferson Street there... They lived there. Next to them were Owens', Rice's, Brown's, and I can't remember any other house next door with a name... Freeman's... I don't know the other people.... school teachers; and right next to that was my mother's old homestead. Then there was a brick house next to that and a wooden house on the corner. And it was the same way. Of course, Fifth Avenue didn't change as much as Gardner Street has. It's a pretty steady the last ten years. Mrs. Barber, she died in the last ten years. She's the mother of the Barber brothers that own the bank. And she was one of the last to stay. Of course, there was one black in the district even then.

STERLING: Do you remember anything about Joliet politics back that far? Were there any really outstanding mayors?

McROBERTS: I don't think so. /Laughter/ No, couldn't see much difference in any of them; they were all politicians. Just like they are today only not as openly crooked as they are today. /Laughter/ ...Weren't there some more pictures up in those albums in the attic?

STERLING: Oh, are there?

McROBERTS: Oh, yes. Most of them are photographs of people. But there are other pictures.

STERLING: If you get up and around and clean up a little bit before you sell, I would certainly appreciate the chance to come and get some more information... Some of these pictures of Dellwood are priceless.

McROBERTS: I suppose so. Just don't think I am senile because I'm telling you all this stuff. /Laughter/

STERLING: Listen, we have interviewed all kinds of people, and you probably know some of them. Bess Barns, did you know Miss Barns?

McROBERTS: Oh sure. She was teaching high school when I went there.

STERLING: In fact your daughters gave me about thirty leads, I guess.

Mrs. TURLEY (daughter): How old were you when they put electricity in, instead of going around lighting the light posts?

McROBERTS: I was a real small boy. I know that my grandpa kind of fought for that to get a light on the corner. He used to have a kind of little political club to get a light on the corner. It was in when I was real small because the sparrows used to build their nests up there, and we would wait for the guy to come around and change the carbons. They were big carbons about the size of my finger. Two of them would come down about that far and then electricity would come through. We used to wait until he changed the carbons, and he would have to throw out all the sparrow nests, and we'd get the eggs. /Laughter/

STERLING: Can you remember when you got your telephone?

McROBERTS: Yes. I was two. We had the Northwestern. It was from Chicago, two different phones.

STERLING: You got the Northwestern installed here though?

McROBERTS: Yes.

STERLING: Was that preferable to the Chicago? Why would you choose one over the other?

McROBERTS: I couldn't tell you. The Northwestern gradually deteriorated until the Chicago overtook it so that there wasn't hardly any Northwesterns anymore.

Mrs. TURLEY: Now they had what, gaslight in here when they built this house?

McROBERTS: No.

Mrs. TURLEY: What kind of light did they have?

McROBERTS: Kerosene lights. That's one thing I never remembered was the candle lights. It was kerosene lights. I often wish I had it now. They are beautiful; we had kind of a rosy-red lamp, and it came up and down on chains in the hall for a hall light. Out in the kitchen, we kept that until after I was married. One came down and was half gas and half electricity. If the electricity failed, you could turn on the gas in there. But we regularly -- we had a mantle-- and that's how they got it. I don't know what you would call it. It made a pretty good light.

Mrs. TURLEY: Did they have plumbing in the house when it was built?

McROBERTS: Oh, no. No sewer for about a year and no water. I was a small kid when the water went through. The pump that we used was out on the back porch. We used to pump it from a well. I forget, twenty feet or something. The plumbing was put in; and we had gaslights put in; and after that when the electricity came through, we had the electricity. What else is there?

Mrs. TURLEY: That's about it.

STERLING: I see we're running out of tape. I certainly appreciate your taking the time to talk to me.

INDEX

- accidents, 16
- (air)plane, 8,9
- amusement park, 13
- auction, 18
- automobile(s), 12,17,20,25

- baby rack, 7
- bakery, 11
- band, (dance), 16
- bandstand, 16
- Mrs. Barber, 29
- Barber Brothers, 29
- barn, 5,26
- Barns, Bess, 30
- Barrett's Building, 23
- Bartlett, Tommy, 11
- Bentley, (Mr.), 11
- blacks, 10
- Blackwell, J.R., 8
- Blacy's, 28
- blast furnaces, 15
- boats, 7,10
- boat house, 7,10,13
- Briggs Street, 27
- Brookman, 27
- buggy, 20

- calendar factory, 10
- California, 18
- canal, 20
- carnival, 11
- Carson, Pieie, 12
- Cass Street, 28
- Centennial, 9
- Central School, 22
- Channahon, 17
- Chatauqua Building, 11
- church picnics, 12
- Chicago, 5,12,13,26,28,30
- (the) Chicago (phone co.), 31
- cigar factory, 9
- Colgrove, George, 24
- colonial, 28
- concave mirror houses, 15
- courthouse, 18
- crew, 10

- dance floor, 7,11
- dance hall, 12
- date of birth, 5
- Dellwood Park, 6,8,9,10,11, 16,15,29

- diesels, 23

- E. J. & E., 5, 21, 23
- East Joliet, 24
- electric line, 12
- Electric Park, 16,17
- electric railroad,13
- railway, 17
- electric train, 15
- electricity, 10, 23, 30, 31
- engineers, 24

- Fagan's Jewelry Store, 18
- father, 5
- Fifth Avenue, 27
- fire department, 19
- first car, 26
- first plane, 9
- flood, 24, 25
- foot bridge, 15
- Ford, (1910 model), 26
- Fourth of July, 12

- G.A.R. encampment, parade, 18
- gas, 26
- gaslight, 31
- Goose Lake, 23
- grandparents, 9,21
- grandstand, 8

- hamburgher stand, 11
- high school, 19,22,30
- horses, 19
- hospital, 6

- Ingalls Park, 27
- Interstate 80, 25
- Irish songs, 16

- Jefferson Street, 28, 29
- Joliet, 9,11,12,18,22,23,24
- Joliet Band, 11
- Joliet Standards, 8, 14
- Jordan, (Mr.), 11,12,13

- kerosene lamps, 23
- kerosene lights, 31
- Kinsley's, 29

- Labor Day, 12
- Lake Chautauqua, 15
- light posts, 30

INDEX

- liquor, 13
- Lockport, 10,11,15
- log cabin, 5
- lunch rooms, 9
- manhole, 24, 25
- manual arts center, 22
- Marshall Field's, 12
- McFadden's Livery Stable, 18
- McRoberts, Jack, 5
- midway, (the), 11
- messenger boy, 8
- mill, 15, 20, 23
- Mississippi, 25
- money, 15
- mother, 5
- motion pictures, 28
- motion picture theater,
 - 1902, 24
 - 1908, 6,18
 - 1909, 6, 18
 - 1910, 6, 26
 - 1911, 18
 - 1912, 9, 19, 26
 - 1914, 19
- North Eastern Avenue, 11
- Northwestern (phone co.), 30,
31
- Opera House, 28
- Orpheum, 28
- Parry, Ed., 24
- parents, 19
- Philadelphia, 12,13
- photograph shop, 15
- picture(s), 8,10,14,17,
18, 20, 27, 29
- politician, national, 16
- politics, Joliet, 29
- Princess, 28
- rent, 7
- Rock Island, 18
- Rock Run Park, 17, 20
- sanitary canal, 22
- school teachers, 29
- Scott Street, 19
- shooting gallery, 7
- shoot-the-shoots, 17
- Silk Stocking Seventh, 29
- Sox (White), 14
- Spot Cash (store), 20
- Standard Oil Company, 26
- steam engine, 20
- steel mill yard, 24
- Steel Works Club, 20,21
- streetcars, 12; lines, 8
- Stillman's 28
- Sunday School picnics, 13
- surrey, 23
- talking machine, 8
- telephone,30
- theater, 7,8,15
- tickets, 7, 8, 10, 21
- ticket-taker, 6
- tobacco shop, 9
- tower, 13, 14
- tracks, 12
- tunnel, 15, 16
- twins, 10, 11
- Union Depot, 24
- United States, 27
- Vic's Motorcycle Shop, 18
- Washington Street, 9, 24, 27
- Will County Fairgrounds, 27
- yardmaster, 5

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARY
JOLIET, ILLINOIS

